Full of Surprises

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Full of Surprises

Astronema was in her room, looking at Zhane's picture and memorizing his face to the slightest detail. All she had was a memory. She may never see him again.

"Astronema."

She hid the picture behind her back. "Yes, Ecliptor?"

"Dark Spectre wishes to speak with you."

"I'll be right there." She put the photograph away as soon as his back was turned, and then hurried to catch up with him.

Astronema's staff appeared in her hand. "What is it you require of me?"

"I have a special assignment. I need you to train my nephew, Brand. He is human, you are not allowed to ask."

"There's nothing wrong with that." Astronema said defensively.

"You forget your weakness." Astronema scowled. "Despite that you are a powerful warrior."

"I will not fail you."

"You'd better not."

"I'll start setting up a training program right away. Come on, Ecliptor."

"In a minute, Princess. We need to discuss a matter of some importance. It doesn't concern you."

Astronema shrugged and left the room.

"She fell for it."

Ecliptor sighed. "Master, I'd advise against this. She's very picky."

"She has no choice." Dark Spectre growled. "She will marry him. All over the universe, girls swoon, not just out of fear, but because of his good looks. That will be plenty."

"As you wish."

* * * * * *

Ecliptor and Astronema were waiting in her room, impatient for Brand's arrival. It wasn't long before Elgar showed up.

"Presenting, Prince Brand." He bowed. Astronema snickered.

Elgar stepped aside and Brand came in, followed by two Quantrons.

Astronema's jaw dropped. He was tall with black hair, green eyes, and large muscles. He was the most gorgeous guy she had ever seen. But he still couldn't hold a lamppost to Zhane. Astronema thought loyally. It took her a few minutes to realize that while she was staring at him, everyone else was staring at her.

"You must be Princess Astronema." Brand said, once the staring contest was over.

"Uh, right, that's me." Astronema said, still a little tongue-tied.

Brand bowed. "My uncle told me you were a powerful warrior. He didn't say you were beautiful as well.

Astronema blushed. Ecliptor gave him his version of an angry glare, but stopped when he remembered Dark Spectre's ulterior motive.

"Well, let's get started." They teleported onto an asteroid specifically set up for this training session. There was a group of about ten Quantrons waiting.

"Let's see what you can do." He nodded. The Quantrons slowly approached Brand. Within five minutes and seven seconds, according to Astronema's stopwatch, not a single Quantron was left standing.

"He needs training?" Astronema whispered in disbelief. Brand came over them.

"I could have handled a lot more than that." He boasted. "You shouldn't have gone so easy on me."

Ecliptor snorted. "I think we've had enough for today."

"But we haven't even started." Brand said puzzled.

Astronema was puzzled too. But she figured Ecliptor just didn't like Brand's attitude. She wasn't so crazy about it either. And she didn't like the way he was looking at her.

"He's right. I can't afford to lose anymore Quantrons. And I have a headache anyway." Astronema teleported away.

"I like her. I barely spoke to her, but who needs that?" Brand grinned.

Ecliptor grabbed him by his shirt. "Listen up." He growled. "You may be Dark Spectre's nephew but that doesn't mean I'm going to be any kinder to you if you disrespect her in anyway. She means more to me than all the gold in the universe. Understand?"

"Relax. It was just an observation. No big deal. And it's not me you should worry about. She was drooling all over me. Just you wait. She'll be, what's that expression? Something about putty or hands, something like that."

Ecliptor sighed. Not only was this guy a conceited pig, he was a stupid conceited pig.

* * * * * *

About a week or so later, Astronema was brooding about things while Brand had his "training." It was a total waste of time, but Astronema liked it because it gave her a chance to think. Brand sometimes came over to say something to her, or Ecliptor would make a comment, but it was rare.

On this particular day, she was brooding about three things, or, rather, three people. Ecliptor, Zhane, and her brother, whose name she couldn't even remember. She had been thinking about them more often than usual, and in someways, they were all connected. Ecliptor had been acting strangely ever since Brand arrived. And even before that, she had been doubting that she could trust him. After she had found out that he had sent the monster Zhane spoke of, she was furious that he disobeyed her orders. He had always told her the Power Rangers destroyed family. But after spending time with Zhane, she had wondered if it was true. He had seemed so kind. Why would he kill an innocent little boy? This was extremely hard for her to face because Ecliptor was like a father to her. She missed Zhane so much. She wished she could make up with him, but she didn't even know where he was. As for her brother, she had a strong feeling that he was alive. Or perhaps it was just a foolish hope. Sometimes she felt that everything in the universe was just one big secret, kept only from her.

Astronema's thoughts were interrupted by Brand calling her name.

"My uncle wishes to speak with us."

"What does he want?" Astronema asked, alarmed.

Brand shrugged. But he had a mischievous grin on his face, like he knew, and wasn't going to tell her.

The three of them teleported back onto the Dark Fortress.

"Is there something wrong, Dark Spectre?" asked Astronema.

"No, is there?"

"No, not at all," she replied.

"Good. I've heard things have been going well. Now I have something else I want you to do."

"Whatever you wish."

"I want you to marry Brand."

Astronema gasped. "But, sir..." she began to protest.

"My decision has been made. Do you dare disobey me?"

"Of course not. She knows better than that." Ecliptor said quickly.

"Uh, right. Excuse me for a minute." Astronema hurried out, as fast as she could.

* * * * * *

She teleported to Earth, to the clearing in the forest where she had her disastrous date with Zhane. She turned into her human form and just walked for hours, through Angel Grove Park, past Angel Grove High, and was all the way downtown when she realized she was lost. She sat on the step of a building, the Surf Spot. Just then the door opened. Astronema jumped out of the way just in time.

"Oh, sorry!" She exclaimed.

"That's all right." The woman who came out smiled pleasantly. It was Adele.

Astronema looked at her strangely. She wasn't used to other humans. Especially when they were being nice and not fleeing in terror.

Adele started to go back inside. "Coming in?"

Astronema shrugged.

"You look lost." Adele remarked.

"Well, maybe a little." She admitted.

"Are you new around here?"

"No. I'm just visiting."

"Do you know where you're supposed to be?"

Astronema shook her head.

"Are you with your parents? Or someone you know?"

"No, I don't really know anyone here. My father doesn't know where I am."

"And your mother?"

"I don't have one. Or a father for that matter. I was adopted. My family died when I was little."

Adele clucked her tongue sympathetically. "How did they die?"

"Um, car accident." Astronema lied. "My father doesn't know where I am because I'm sort of running away." She was eager to change the subject. And, she realized, it was true. She was running away.

"Running away? My, doesn't your life sound like a soap opera. What was so terrible that you're running away for?" Adele bit her lip. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to be nosy."

"It's okay. My father wants me to get married. To his, er, boss' son. I don't want to. He's a real jerk. But if I don't, my father could lose his job." Or his life. She thought to herself.

"Reality never ceases to amaze me. And I thought the Power Rangers sounded like something on t.v."

Astronema smiled weakly.

"Why don't you come inside, have something to eat." Adele held the door open.

"That would be nice, but I don't have any money."

"Don't worry about it. It's on me."

"Well, okay." Astronema followed her inside. Adele sat her at a table near the counter.

"So, what would you like? Hamburgers are my specialty."

"Okay, I guess I'll have that then." She replied uncertainly.

"I'll be back in a little while."

Astronema looked around. It was strange to be inside this place. But then she heard a voice she recognized. It was the Red Ranger!

"Welcome back, Zhane."

Astronema's heart beat faster at that name. She turned around. The Power rangers were sitting right behind her! And Zhane was with them!

Astronema had been watching them for a few minutes when Adele came back.

Adele chuckled when she saw what she was looking at. "You don't get a bunch of kids nicer than that. They're some of my favorite customers. You see that boy?" She pointed to Zhane. "His parents died in a car accident too. He almost didn't make it himself. He was in the hospital for a long time. Told ya I was nosy."

Astronema nodded. She knew that Zhane's parents weren't killed in a car accident. Like many others, they had probably fled from K-O-35. And Zhane, rather then being in a hospital, was in cryogenic suspension for two years.

"Come, I'll introduce you. What's your name, anyway?"

"My name? Um, Karen." She had no idea where she came up with that. But it would do. Astronema followed Adele to the Power Ranger's table. Her hamburger was long forgotten.

"Guys, this is Karen. She's not from around here and doesn't know anyone. But I think you'd get along great." Adele returned to her other customers.

"Hi," she said timidly. Zhane smiled at her.

"Would you like to sit down?" Ashley asked.

"Uh, okay," she pulled up a chair between the two girls, across from Zhane.

"Why are you in Angel Grove?" Cassie asked.

Astronema repeated the story she gave to Adele.

"You've been on your own for a while than." Zhane remarked.

"How do you know?" asked Andros.

"I bumped into her at the movies. Literally."

Astronema blushed. But she was thrilled. She had figured he'd forgotten that, since it wasn't such an important detail. But, she reminded herself, that doesn't mean he liked me.

"Hey, aren't we going to the park?" Carlos said, after a while.

"Yeah," T. J. agreed. "Let's go."

"Wanna come with us?" Zhane asked.

"Sure." She responded eagerly.

They said good-bye to Adele, and left. When they got there, T. J. and Carlos started to play catch. The rest of them sat on a bench nearby.

"I know how you feel. My grandma wanted me to get married a little while ago." Ashley told her. "So I told her Carlos was my boyfriend. She wasn't really forcing me, I just didn't want to disappoint her."

"Yeah, well, you're grandma is a good person. Dark Spectre..." T. J. and Carlos stopped playing. They all stared at her.

"Did you say Dark Spectre?" Andros asked.

"Yeah. I did." She admitted.

"You are Astronema, aren't you?" Zhane said softly, so she was the only that heard him."

She nodded. "I am Astronema. But I am running away. Dark Spectre wants me to marry his nephew, Brand. I don't want to. But if I don't..." She drew her finger across her throat.

"What about your family?" Cassie asked. "They didn't really die in a car accident."

"No. I don't know how they died. Ecliptor always told me you killed them, but I don't believe it anymore."

"We certainly didn't. We probably were too little. And I don't think any other Rangers did." Zhane remarked. "Why would they?"

Astronema shrugged. "I don't know. I think they were just ordinary humans. I've always wondered. My parents could have done something really bad, but why would they kill an innocent little boy?"

"We wouldn't. It's not our way."

"I've always had a strange feeling that he wasn't dead after all."

"That could be." Andros said, putting his hand on her shoulder. "I definitely can sympathize. When I was little, Darkonda kidnaped my sister. I'm still searching for her. I know she's still alive. He told me when I got Zordon's keycards. But he discovered me before he said where she is."

"Well, at least you have some clues. I only have one thing connecting me to my brother. And it won't help me at all. But I can help you." She volunteered.

"You can?"

"Of course. Darkonda works for Dark Spectre, so I should be able to find something about her in the Dark Fortress's computer. What was your sister's name?"

"Karone of K-O-35. But how can you go back there?"

Astronema smiled. "I have a plan. I'll just say I'll marry him. I can hold off the wedding and look for your sister. Then I'll run away again. I don't know where I'll go after that, but I'll figure

something out."

Andros looked at the others. They hesitated, then nodded. "You can live with us."

"I can? Thank you! I'm sick of being evil... I can't believe it..., me living with the Power Rangers." Excited, she threw her arms around Andros, who turned bright red. Embarrassed, she released him. "Sorry." She apologized.

Andros shrugged. "It's okay. I should be used to it by now." He glanced at Ashley, who grinned.

"Now that that's settled, can I talk to you for a minute?"

"Of course." Zhane took her arm and led her away.

"I guess, since we'll be living together, we should patch things up."

"Yeah, we should."

"I was worried you might not want to because of me."

"No, that was even more reason for it. It's why I couldn't marry Brand. He's different from everything I want, different from you in every way. I can never love him the way I love you."

Zhane's jaw dropped.

"Did I just say that aloud?"

"Uh, yeah, you did."

"Oops. Sorry."

"Don't be. I'm confused. I thought you said you never wanted to see me again."

"Well, Sometimes people say things they don't mean. And sometimes people feel things they don't say." She looked at him hopefully.

"Only because they don't know how people will react if they say them."

"And if they find out?"

"Then you can say them without fear." He took her hand.

"Three words. All I've wished for. More precious to me then all the gold and jewels in the universe."

"You're much more precious to me than that."

Astronema closed her eyes. When she kissed him, she felt something she never felt before. Love. And she knew she'd never feel that with anyone but him. Astronema sighed. This day was full of surprises. And there were more of them to come.

* * * * * *

About half an hour later, Astronema managed to tear herself away from Zhane and returned to the Dark Fortress. It was strangely silent. Everyone was out looking for her. Astronema went to the computer quietly, so not to attract any unwanted attention. She typed in 'Karone of K-O-35.' On the screen it read 'Enter access code.' She typed something else in. The screen flashed 'Access denied.' Astronema was puzzled. She had never been denied access to anything in it before. She shrugged. There were other ways to find out.

"Astronema, you're back." Ecliptor entered the room. He looked both surprised and disappointed to see her.

"Yes, I've decided to marry Brand. I was just in shock before. He's everything I could want. Strong, handsome, evil. And for my wedding present to him I will destroy the Power Rangers. That's where you come in."

"How can I assist you?"

"I need information. About the Red Ranger's sister. I have heard that Darkonda kidnapped her many years ago. I'll make them surrender in exchange for her safety. You've known Darkonda for a long time, so I assume you know where she is."

Ecliptor certainly wasn't expecting this. "No, I don't." He said firmly. "That girl is gone."

"But Darkonda said she was alive."

"Have you spoken to him about this?" Ecliptor asked nervously.

"No. He told the Red Ranger she was alive. He was going to trade Zordon's key cards for information. But Darkonda discovered his identity before he told him where she is."

"Well, she was destroyed afterwards. Keep out of it. I'll help you think of another plan."

"Very well." She didn't believe him for a second. It wouldn't be the first time he lied to her. But what was he hiding? Ecliptor left, stopping for a moment to glare at Darkonda, who had just come in.

"Darkonda, good timing." She said, once Ecliptor was out of earshot.

"What is it you wish of me, Princess?" He snickered at that last word.

Astronema didn't find it so funny. "I need information about a girl you kidnapped many years ago. Karone of K-O-35. The sister of the Red Ranger."

Darkonda snickered again. "But of course."

"Where is she?"

"In a very unlikely place. I was wondering when you'd ask me. I'm sure Ecliptor hasn't been much of a help to you."

"No, he said she was gone."

"He just wants to believe it himself. But don't be upset with him. He's just trying to protect you. Heh, heh, heh."

Astronema frowned. "I don't see what's so amusing."

"Well, you see, it is very complicated. Perhaps it isn't my place to tell you. But the truth is..."

"Darkonda." Ecliptor burst into the room. "I need your assistance."

"Can it wait?"

"No, come now!"

"We shall finish this later." He bowed deeply and followed Ecliptor.

Ecliptor pointed his sword at him. "If you tell her anything..."

"Now, now, Ecliptor, don't be such a worrywart. You're just upset because she doesn't trust you anymore. But you must have realized it was bound to happen someday."

"Get out. Now."

"Very well. But I shall return. After all, I'm sure Astronema wants me." Darkonda chuckled and disappeared.

* * * * * *

Disappointed that her search reached a dead end, Astronema teleported back to Earth. She almost forgot to change back into her human form. Luckily she remembered just in time.

She headed back to the Surf Spot. Zhane was there talking to Adele.

"Back again?" Adele said, smiling.

"Yeah."

Zhane noticed how upset she looked. "Come on. We'll see you later."

"Bye."

They stopped when they got to the door. "What's the matter?" Zhane asked.

"I couldn't find her. Everybody knows something, they're just not telling me. Darkonda was going to, but Ecliptor stopped him for some reason. She's in the computer, but it was blocked from me. I'm sorry."

"It's okay. Andros won't be mad at you. Disappointed, but it's not your fault." Zhane thought for a moment. "But if it's in a computer, Carlos and I should be able to find it. We're good at that stuff. We should go back to the Megaship."

"Me too?"

"Of course. You are going to be living there after all. And I'm going to need your help."

"Okay, I guess. I'm not very good with computers, but I'll do what I can."

"I'm sure you will." Zhane smiled at her. Then they teleported away.

* * * * * *

When they arrived, everyone was surprised to see her so soon. It wasn't a pleasant surprise for D.E.C.A. who was still angry about what she did to her when she was Ashley. Or Alpha, who thought they were all insane.

Zhane went straight to the control panel and began clicking away.

"What's he doing?" Andros asked, puzzled.

"He's trying to get into the Dark Fortress' computer system." Astronema realized.

"Got it!" Zhane exclaimed. "What did you do first?"

"I just typed 'Karone of K-O-35'."

Zhane did so and the same message came up. "Carlos, can you help me for a minute."

"Sure." Carlos went over to him.

"What are they going to do?" asked Ashley.

"They're going to try to crack the access code." Andros replied. "Don't ask me how. I haven't got a clue."

"I did it!" Zhane announced a few minutes later. "Hmm."

"What is it?" Astronema asked.

"That's funny. It says Karone, but under it, it has your name."

"What?"

Zhane read the information to them. "It says: 'Karone of K-O-35 was kidnapped by Darkonda.' That parts true. But then it says: 'She was given to Ecliptor and rose to become Astronema, Princess of Evil.'"

"You've got to be kidding me. There must be some mistake."

"Maybe not." Andros said. "It does make sense. Karone was kidnapped around the same time your family was supposedly killed. What was the thing you said was the only thing connecting you to your brother?"

"That's my locket."

"Can I see it?"

Astronema took it off and handed it to him. Andros slowly opened it up. Inside were two pictures of Andros and Karone when they were little. Andros quickly pulled out his.

Astronema gasped. "I don't believe. All this time, you were right under my nose." She threw her arms around him for the second time that day.

"We'll have to do some tests to be sure, but I believe it. You are Karone."

Tears started rolling down her cheeks. Andros patted her on the back. The others watched. Ashley was crying a little, too.

"Why don't we make sure before you people flood this place." D.E.C.A. said, annoyed.

Karone/Astronema wiped her eyes. "Okay."

She, Andros and Alpha went to the Medical Bay. The others followed.

"Humph! Humans."

"Well, not everyone's a computer like you.' Andros retorted. "And a good thing, too."

"Hold still." Alpha said. Karone obeyed and he was able to check her blood.

"Well, the results are in." Alpha said, a few minutes later. "She is Karone."

The Rangers cheered. They crowded around her in a group hug. Karone blushed. She turned even redder when Zhane kissed her in front of everyone. But it was the happiest day of her life.

The End.

End
file.